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SUBJECT: RWANDA: FY 2006 ESF PROJECT PROPOSALS

REF: STATE 59002

¶1. Per reftel post submits the following summaries of two proposed projects for FY 2006 Africa regional ESF funding, including the total amount requested for each project and an explanation of how the projects would advance our MPP objectives and U.S. national interests. The projects focus on strengthening the judicial sector and media professionalism and press freedom in Rwanda, both of which are critical elements of our MPP strategic goals. Embassy developed these proposals in close consultation with USAID-Rwanda.

#### Justice Sector

¶2. Post requests USD 500,000 for justice sector reforms. The justice sector in Rwanda has made notable progress in the last several years, including Constitutional support for a fully independent judiciary in 2003, a complete overhaul of judicial staff in 2004, and jurisdictional restructuring to match new executive administrative regions in 2006. Unfortunately, while these reforms have substantially improved and modernized the Rwandan court system, they have also exacerbated a substantial backlog of cases. The regular court system now has a backlog of over 47,000 cases (for about 250 judges). This is expected to worsen as category 1 genocide cases (the most serious category of genocide-related crimes) are transferred from gacaca courts. However, the justice sector is taking the problem very seriously, and is preparing an approach that will include temporary circuit-riding teams of judges and prosecutors as well as a longer-term approach to build IT links among courts, prosecutors, and police. Aiding this effort would strengthen the rule of law in Rwanda, and contribute to the country's continued stability and evolving democracy.

¶3. USAID has experience with similar activities in other countries (e.g., Kosovo and Serbia), and would draw on this expertise in designing a program, in conjunction with the Rwandan Supreme Court and other partners, to reduce the case backlog. Support would likely include: training in case management for court registrars and clerks; development of streamlined case management procedures; short-term assistance by law students (or similar) in reviewing and making initial viability recommendations on old files; and support for expansion of IT facilities. The activity itself would be managed by USAID and implemented through a USAID rapid contracting mechanism (IQC). Progress toward MPP goals would be measured by the rate at which the pending cases are processed and by the overall reduction in volume.

¶4. A sub-element of this project would support a judges' association to help more aggressive mid/lower-level judges push for more judicial independence, the local abunzi (mediation committees), and further training on court financing. The draft report for the recently completed USAID-funded court financing project recommended substantially more training in this area.

¶5. Post requests USD 200,000 to improve media professionalism. While Rwandan media today enjoy greater freedom than they have in recent years, they also suffer from some restrictions and from extensive government criticism and harassment. It is true that Rwandan journalism is of a uniformly low quality, and some criticisms are justified. Embassy proposes addressing this problem by supporting a media training center, the "Great Lakes Media Institute," in Kigali.

¶6. The center, which has already attracted pledges of substantial support from American media outlets, would work with the National University of Rwanda (NUR) Journalism School to promote the strengthening of the journalism environment through training. The training center would serve as an extension program of the NUR School of Journalism and Communication to strengthen the school's mission of reaching out to the journalist community. NUR journalism students would receive academic credit for studies completed at the institute. NUR professors could periodically teach and/or take courses, and visiting journalism lecturers and experts at the institute could conduct short courses at NUR.

¶7. This training, documentation and research initiative aims to elevate the current quality of journalism in radio, televisions, newspapers, photojournalism, the multimedia sector and documentary video for practicing journalists and university students in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region. More objective and reliable media in Rwanda would help reduce tensions in the country and the region, and provide citizens with a better opportunity to make informed decisions about governance and economic issues. Support for the institute would be managed by USAID through a grant or cooperative agreement with the Great Lakes Media Institute, which would run the training courses. Progress toward achieving MPP strategic goals in the area of enhancing democratic systems and practices would be measured by the number of participating trainees and the degree to which the Rwandan government stops criticizing the overall caliber of journalists and specific newspaper articles and radio broadcasts.

Arietti